Chester T. Lane

Principal, Fort Wayne High and Manual Training School (Central High School), 1879-1915

A Memorial To Chester T. Lane

Principal of the Fort Wayne High School, 1879-1915

By

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by

REX M. POTTERF

We are met today to render our humble tribute to a great and towering scholar, administrator, teacher and leader of youth. Our local educational hall of fame is illuminated by the genius of many great school administrators, consecrated school board members, eminent scholars and skillful and sympathetic teachers. None, however, has left a deeper imprimature upon his fellows and pupils than has Chester T. Lane. The undertow of the mighty intellectual currents he set in motion is a powerful influence today, many years later. Good schools regulate the body politic. Their incessant action and pressure cause the life-blood to circulate and return pure and healthful to the heart of the nation.

In deep humility I stand in the long penumbra of this great man as it lingers over us after a half-century. I have sought to become acquainted with him by many conversations with those who knew him and who have testified to his true qualities.

In his honor we are naming this school which will perpetuate his memory long after those who knew him have left the scene. So I make these remarks in appreciation of a colossus in the field of education.

In 1872, a rudimentary high school emerged in Fort Wayne administered first by Robert M. Wright

who served until his resignation in 1879. Thereafter, Charles K. Latham was principal for a short time. When the latter resigned, the Board of School Trustees and Superintendent John S. Irwin gave much thought to developing school problems which indicated the need for an enriched curriculum beyond the elementary school level. In the nation at large the high school was still in the experimental stage but these wise and prudent educators saw it as a wave of the future. As a first step in their quest for qualitative education, they called upon the President of the University of Michigan for assistance in securing a suitable and scholarly man to serve as high school principal. President James B. Angell recommended Chester T. Lane for the position.

Mr. Lane was born in Jackson County, Michigan, October 31, 1851, the son of David and Minerva J. (Crawford) Lane, both natives of New York. He remained on the family farm until he was fifteen years old. He then entered the public schools of Jackson, Michigan, to which city his parents had moved. He was graduated from the Jackson High School in 1869. In the fall of 1870, he matriculated in the University of Michigan. Completing a full classical course, he was graduated in June, 1874. Mr. Lane's excellent scholarship was recognized by his teachers. At the time of his graduation no Phi Beta Kappa existed at Michigan. Many years later a chapter of that scholarship fraternity was established; and on graduation Winthrop Lane, son of Chester T., received his key in the first class so honored. Simultaneously his father was belatedly recognized.

For five years (1874-1879) Chester T. Lane served as high school principal at Ypsilanti, Michigan. Chester T. Lane thereafter served as principal

of the Fort Wayne High School for the ensuing thirty-six years, terminating his professional career here in 1915.

The period of Mr. Lane's tenure at the Fort Wayne High School, 1879-1915, saw much that was formative in the American nation. Some of the landmarks of the period were the disappearance of the western frontier, the last of the Indian wars, Custer's defeat, the early stirrings of Union labor, the annexation of Hawaii, the Spanish-American War, the beginning of the World War, the last twenty-four years of Queen Victoria's reign, the flight of Wright's plane at Kitty Hawk, the sinking of the TITANIC and the invention of wireless telegraphy.

Indiana saw the building of the Indiana State House and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Fort Wayne saw the erection of the first Presbyterian Church, the Scottish Rite and Masonic Temples, the Carnegie Public Library and Central High School. Educationally it was the period of high school education for the elite. Too, it saw the enactment of state compulsory attendance laws which brought many boys and girls of mediocre or less ability into the schools with little curricular change to meet their as yet unrecognized needs.

Like the phosphorescent after glow which lingers long in the western heavens following a beautiful sunset, the evidences of C. T. Lane's guidance of youth have remained long after his passing. Mr. Lane's High School was patterned on the Boston Latin School and was, along with Shortridge High School of Indianapolis, numbered among the best. In a day when admission to college was largely based on examination, a diploma from Fort Wayne High School,

as it was called at first, was widely recognized as evidence of suitable scholastic proficiency for entrance to the best colleges.

A half-century after he left the Fort Wayne High School we may appraise his work by an enumeration of some of his graduates. The evidence of this delayed reaction lasting through more than eighty years is the presence among us of Adolph Hofer, Dr. Victor H. Hilgemann, William T. McKay, Willard Shambaugh, W. A. Rodemeyer, Frank Bohn, Allen J. Tremper, Marion Bash, Alice Foster McCulloch, Dr. N. L. Salon, Arthur Parry, James M. Barrett, Jr., Wayne L. Thieme, General Paul Baade, George W. Fishering, Arthur P. Irmscher, Cleo Goff Wilkens, Dorothy Detzer and others. Likewise many eminent persons no longer living were his students, some of whom were Albert Schaaf, Frank B. Taylor, Judge Harry Hilgemann, Col. Clyde Dreisbach, Larene Travers McDonold, Dr. Maurice L. Rosenthal, Judge D. Burns Douglas, Judge Harry Muller, Angus C. McCoy, Robert Feustel, Senator Samuel D. Jackson, Bessie K. Roberts, Herman Freiburger, Judge William Schannen, Hiram K. Moderwell, and many others of Mr. Lane's well-loved students. These men and women responded to the guidance of Mr. Lane. All would testify to their reliance upon his influence and leadership. Their mounting and continuing successes are mute testimony to him. Scratch the green rind of a sapling or wantonly twist it in the soil, and a scarred or crooked oak will tell of the act for centuries to come. The teaching of youth impresses the mind and heart forever.

Numerous facets and professional interests combined to reveal Mr. Lane as a person of cosmopolitan tastes. Student and book lover, he was the

possessor of a large private library upon which he lavished his affection and in which he spent every possible moment. He was a founder and an active member of the Fortnightly Club. A lover of tennis, he was an able and skilled player. In a court on his premises he often played with adult friends and favored students. He played vigorously and played to win. Late in life when he could exercise less vigorously he played croquet with his friends. He was a skillful card player.

Mr. Lane was a teacher of subjects which were widely believed to inculcate formal discipline: Latin, Greek, and geometry. His teaching of the AENEID, the ILLIAD and the ODYSSEY caused them to come alive. Ajax, Hector, Priam, Paris, Aeneas and Ulysses became real, living characters. These ancient Titans invaded the lives of his pupils and became, under Mr. Lane's teaching, authentic heroes. They engrossed the minds of the boys and girls not as thought portrayed in a dead language but as blithe and sprightly personalities. Often Mr. Lane held his class in VERGIL spellbound by his skillful rendering of the text of the AENEID from memory accompanied by a free and beautiful translation as vivid and moving as a Broadway drama. In a day when the study of Latin dominated the high school curriculum, Mr. Lane taught that subject with enthusiasm, skill, and scholarship of a high order. He was familiar with the passages of CAESAR, CICERO and the AENEID which the students translated, parsed and analyzed. Many of the more spectacular passages he had conned by note, and it was a delight to hear him read them and to render a free translation. Often when he visited a Latin class, he entered into the class discussion and stimulated the better students by the example of his own scholarship. His rendition of the beautiful poetry

and iambic hexameter of VERGIL is well remembered by some of his students as a living experience with that ancient tongue.

Mr. Lane believed in formal discipline and his teaching made Latin, Greek and geometry effective vehicles in producing a high quality of mental training and discipline. His standard of excellence excluded the dullard, the slacker and the student of low achievement quotient.

Geometry in Mr. Lane's class was an exercise in reflective thinking. It entailed pure reasoning involving proven premises and evident particulars. The pupil who studied geometry in Mr. Lane's class learned to think. The demonstration of a theorem or the solution of a problem by geometric formula was an exercise in reflective thinking and actually taught them to solve other confronting problems. Educators widely believed that those studies inculcated in their votaries disciplines which were general in character and possessed identical elements which carried over into many of life's relations. While most teaching of these disciplinary subjects fell far short of such projected results, Mr. Lane actually made this educational theory work. He vigorously pursued excellence as his goal. He tolerated nothing short of perfection on the part of his students and demanded from the best boys and girls all that they could attain. When pupils could not conquer their Latin and mathematics, their place was elsewhere and not at the Fort Wayne High School. Had there been courses in the "Joy of Living" and "Life Adjustment," I am convinced that Mr. Lane would have relegated them to the disposal unit. He did not suffer fools gladly. To him education was a serious business. Boys and girls who failed to achieve deserved little attention.

He was a keen student of current affairs. Although a Democrat in politics, Mr. Lane had championed the tenets of that party only after a long struggle with himself and with political issues. He had been a Republican of strong convictions until 1884. In that year an important segment of the Republican Party experienced a mighty revulsion of sentiment, led by Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge and others, against that party's candidate for President. Mr. Lane served as the local chairman of a mass meeting of these Republicans in Fort Wayne. Thereafter, he left his party on the issue of civil service and ever afterward championed this cause. To him it was paramount among governmental issues and furnished the basis for a correct and progressive government. A lifelong reader of the NEW YORK NATION, he gathered inspiration from the editorials and doctrines of Oswald Villard. As a professional school man he took no part in partisan or local politics. Mr. Lane's professional career paralleled Mayor Hosey's first two administrations. Mr. Lane silently admired and supported this great expert on municipal government. His political philosophy and preferences were for his own guidance alone. He did not discuss them with others.

School discipline under Mr. Lane involved immaculate conduct on the part of youth. His standards involved no nonsense and boys and girls learned to conform to a high standard of behavior. Failure to do so brought certain and condign sanctions which admitted of little deviation.

Mr. Lane had one standard of conduct for all. He sought to create an environment whereby a teacher's energies would be devoted not to solution of disciplinary problems but to fruitful teaching. Parental

pelf and prestige were not reasons for any kind of favoritism. No discriminations favored the affluent or the fortunate. Never in his career did he tolerate any interference with his concept of absolute justice.

Although not a member, Mr. Lane attended the Episcopalian Church and served as an usher. He was a student of the Old Testament and frequently quoted from the Book of Ecclesiastes to support his convictions. On Friday he regularly conducted Chapel in the high school.

By precept, example and deliberate planning, Mr. Lane recruited and assembled an unique faculty of teachers at the Fort Wayne High School. These men and women possessed a breadth and depth of scholarship and individuality which gave the school a substantial and far-reaching reputation of classical excellence.

Mr. Lane's academic purposes were effectuated by the superior and scholarly men and women who composed his staff of instructors. They were of a pattern: qualified, demanding teachers who sought to produce a flow of elite graduates. Some of the notable co-workers were Mary O. Kolb, teacher of social studies, an omnivorous reader, an animated frame of historical reference and a repository of vast and accurate historical knowledge; Herbert Voorhees, inspiring teacher of chemistry and a wide-ranging amateur student and fluent master of several modern foreign languages; Louis C. Ward, knowledgeable in world relations, teacher of geography and a master of the Socratic method who made his subject interesting; Baron Von Caldin, student of Goethe and Heine, teacher of German, sly humorist and a model of continental politeness and courtesy, deeply learned in

classical German; Mary Catherine Smeltzly, world traveller and scintillating teacher of European history; Fred H. Croninger, selfless and kindly teacher of mathematics and assiduous student of Holy Writ; Anna K. Tode, able teacher of English literature; Martin Rothert, teacher of Latin, whose most pleasant pastime was reading Horace, Livy, Juvenal and other Latin authors in the original tongue; W. H. Macmillan, teacher of English, whose conversation was marked by his authentic rhetoric and classical diction; Miss Vera Chamberlain, whom Mr. Lane was later to marry, teacher of English and ardent devotee of all that is beautiful in our language and literature, an omnivorous yet discriminating reader. Her dramatic readings inspired her pupils. Her scholarship was deep and broad. Vera Chamberlain Lane's influence wherever possible was directed toward correct written expression. All of these co-workers were attractive and inspiring personalities. These are only a few of that galaxy of celebrities whom Mr. Lane assembled, trained and moulded to his purpose --the best in classical education. There were several others.

The true test of a great man--that at least which must secure his place among the highest of great men in his having been in advance of his age. Mr. Lane was one of the early advocates of inclusion of manual arts into the high school curriculum. He believed the requirements of the twentieth century demanded provision for a balance between pure disciplinary and the humanitarian studies on one hand and skilled handicrafts on the other. He turned from his first love, the classics, to the creation of a curriculum which involved the foundations of modern industry. Just as he had recruited a devoted staff of classical scholars, he now sought far and wide for

men and women to teach industrial arts. Among the striking personalities whom he employed for this work were Harry Agnew, a skillful mechanic and incisive personality; George Russel, a huge man physically but gentle and kindly and a skilled wood worker; William Knight, an ingenious and cunning worker in metals and forge; Charles Mays, an expert carpenter; and Lee Norford, an able electrician. These and others justified the name of the newly christened Fort Wayne High and Manual Training School.

On August 15, 1876, Chester T. Lane was married to Caroline J. Bloomfield, daughter of Giles and Cornelia R. Bloomfield of Jackson, Michigan. To this union were born six children: Elmer, Ralph, Dan, Robert, Kenneth and Hilda. All of their children are now deceased. Mrs. Caroline Lane is remembered as a lady of refinement, who was a hospitable host and whose spoken English was eminently correct. Caroline Lane died January 22, 1906.

In November, 1908 Chester T. Lane was married to Vera Chamberlain, born November 4, 1877. She was the daughter of William Wallace Chamberlain and Martha Ellen (Williams) Chamberlain. Mrs. Vera Chamberlain Lane outlived Mr. Lane many years and was noted not only as an able teacher but also a leader of women of Fort Wayne. She led them in the advocacy of worthy causes and was successful in keeping her leadership above all personality clashes. She recalled Chester T. Lane as the most remarkable man she ever knew. Mr. Lane died October 21, 1917.

I am indebted to our eminent Fort Wayne historian, Bessie Keeran Roberts, for an estimate of Chester T. Lane which she consented for me to share with you a few days before her death.

"Life began with my third year in high school. It was then I achieved Mr. Lane's Latin and geometry classes. Chester T. Lane is still Mr. Lane to me, and I do not intend to get familiar even now with one who held me in such complete subjection for so long. How to get Mr. Lane on paper in mere words--that is my problem. Well, then, Chester T. Lane to the world and posterity. But Mr. Lane to me.

"What was there about this bronzed man with the crooked smile that burned itself so indelibly into my memory? Not his goatee, a distinguishing mark, nor his sarcasm, which I had reason to recall as long as memory serves, nor the familiar relaxed expression of his face when his eyes and his mouth said different things. Disarming, misleading, kindly it looked to the unwary, the mouth appeared to smile, but the eyes were stern. It was thus he looked at me the time I tried to save the high school bully from suspension for such a minor offense--

"'Mr. Lane, Frank was not to blame for what happened just now. I talked to him first,' I offered after walking the length of the assembly room with all eyes upon me.

"'Will you please toddle right back to your seat and confine your attention to your own affairs? And no more heroics please!' said he to me distinctly so that all could hear.

"With burning cheeks I faced all those eyes on the long walk back to my seat. In spite of such encounters there is only respect and gratitude in my heart for him. Those humiliations burned a lot of impurities out of my composition.

"'How did Miss Jay get you up to recite? Use a pulley and tackle?' was his first caustic remark when I hesitated too long to rise after he had called on me. I was still so green I got my signals mixed. It was humiliating but somehow I survived it. Thereafter, I popped up like a Jack-in-the-Box at the first sound of my name. He put us through the test by sarcasm, and great were the rewards for those who stood that test. Not praise, but a sense of meeting a superior adult in authority on his own ground and coming out even in the conflict was our only reward. There were times when I thought I just could not take it. Then I would find myself once more and go at it again and again and yet again, whether it was a Latin translation or a theorem. The result would be a perfect recitation.

"I never realized what the doubtful reward for all this perseverance could be until I made my first recitation in solid geometry for an instructor in the mathematics department at the State University. He was sitting on a window ledge while he listened without comment to the kind of demonstration I was trained to give daily. When I had finished he said fervently:

"'That was the most beautiful demonstration I have ever seen!'

"And I was never called on after that, I had apparently reached the pinnacle of my mathematics career. And there I was perched up on the pinnacle, with no chance to go either up or down.

"Eager and undisciplined young lives passed in a bewildering stream through Chester Lane's experienced hands, to be guided and directed into smooth channels. All the turbulent and rebellious little ed-

dies were forced to join the main current. Twice I have seen him manhandle a stubborn and insolent student his own size while my heart stood still. There is nothing so disturbing as a clash of wills in a schoolroom. Only once of all the time I came under the lash of his sarcasm did it bring my rebellious tears. My inward seething was so intense then that I could scarcely endure the pressure and finally faced him with my hurt and anger. A matter had to be cleared up if I were ever going to breathe freely. I battled with him over a point of justice until I could no longer speak for the tears that blinded and choked me. I had received a public insult in Latin prose. The inference was that I was copying my work off the board. And you know how hard Latin prose is! The apology, sincere enough, was made in private, and accompanied by a box of the best chocolates handed to me over the heads of the bewildered class, as a concession to a certain feminine frivolity which was assumed to cover my sense of justice with a thin veneer. After all, I was a woman, even though very young, and deeply wounded. He did his best to heal the injury, soothe all the ruffled feelings. And he never hurt me in that way again. Not many men, especially teachers, in one easy lesson learn how to deal with so complex a person.

"During those four years of high school, every one of our weaknesses was revealed. The bluffs were called; the lazy were caught; the dull were not allowed to slow up the bright; the brilliant went their best pace. Scholarship, honesty, and decent striving were given first place in his scale of values. No politics, social standing, family friendships, personal pull had any influence. The humblest girl from the country in quaint clothes and pigtails assumed her true dignity in that classroom if she was earnest, sincere and a

conscientious student. The rich banker's son, wearing a suit made by the best tailor, counted for considerably less if he did not get his own Latin. This system may have been poor preparation for a world where merit does not always count. But I can imagine the recording angel uses such a system in his grading!"

In Shakespeare's HENRY VIII, Act IV, Scene 2, line 52, Griffith might have spoken of Mr. Lane when he characterized Wolsey thus:

"He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one:
Exceeding wise, fair spoken and persuading
Lofty and sour to them that love him not
But to those that sought him sweet as summer."

In THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Emerson might have referred to C. T. Lane when he said: "The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances."

The 1915 Central CALDRON noted of Mr. Lane: ". . . one whose life's work will be reflected in the life, undertakings, and achievements of the young men and women who graduated in classes under his control; . . . one who was always fair and just to all the students, ever ready and anxious to commend industry and application, to speak words of encouragement, and to aid us with wholesome advice under any and all conditions and circumstances . . ." (Central CALDRON, 1915, p. 4).

Otto Von Bismarck said, "A really great man is known by three signs--generosity in the design, humanity in the execution, moderation in success." These attributes were those of Chester T. Lane.

APPENDIX

To: Ralph McClain, Principal
Chester T. Lane Junior High School
4301 Vance Avenue
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Mr. McClain:

Your invitation to former Central High students, who once sat at the feet of the Buddha, to attend the dedication of the Chester T. Lane Junior High School as a fitting memorial to him, is a fine expression of homage to an eminently distinguished scholar, and an able teacher of several generations of Fort Wayne's citizens of various degrees of distinction.

As a pupil, I knew him in his classes of Latin and Geometry, in which his devotion to the classics of Rome, and his keen interests in logical reasoning from premises to conclusions, were my earliest inspiration and insight, to a realization of the power of poetic vision and wisdom, and in the strength and certainty of directed reasoning. That was in my junior year in 1905. In the year 1903, I had come to Central High's "freshmen's heaven" in the third story refurbished attic of the old brick pile on E. Wayne Street. I was a raw product of the farm with the fragrance of the barn yard on my heels, in search of culture.

I knew him as the dinner guest of his sons, Winthrop, '05; Robert, '08; schoolmates with a common interest in the publishing and editing of the "Caldron." Here, in their home on Maple Avenue, as welcoming host at a bountious table, I first sensed the

real and fatherly kind of person he was. At the after-dinner moments of leisure, he joined in the badinage of youth, and in the exchange of humor and smart repartee. This was in my junior and senior years, while enrolled in his classes of "Cicero" and "Virgil," and "Shute's Geometry."

Here at tennis on the court in his own back yard, he played to win! ! How the sweat rolled from his brow and beard! ! Here at play was the same determined effort to excel that he put forth again and again to inspire his students to an appreciation and love of the excellence of Roman Virgil, and the unexcelled oratorical prose of Cicero! !

I've listened to him in solemn declamation to his class; intone those incomparable lines of the Poet Tennyson by him written on the nineteenth century of Virgil's Death:

"Roman Virgil, thou that singests Ilion's lofty
temples robed in fire,
Landscape lover, lord of language . . .
Thou that singests wheat and woodlans . . .
Thou that seest Universal Nature moved by
Universal Mind;"

and so on to the final stirring couplet,

"I salute Thee Montovano, I that loved Thee
since My Day began,
Wielder of the Stateliest Measure ever molded
by the lips of Man;"

"Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit litora, --"

and again:

"Fit via vi, rumpunt aditus," from the dramatic scene of Aeneus with his aged father Anchises on his back, fleeing from burning Troy. "Can't you feel the strength, devotion, and determined purpose of the hero," he would exclaim. He wanted us to enjoy with him, the musical cadences of the Poet's verses, and the bold courage and dramatic skill of Cicero in the public forum denouncing Catiline, the arch conspirator, "O Tempora! O Mores! !"

As geometrician, his aim was genuine; his enthusiasm seemed inexhaustible and self-generative; to inspire the student to the exercise of his reasoning faculties. Don't commit to memory; Think!! Don't be a parrot!! Know the proposition; Know and understand the premises; the definition of terms; accurate conclusions must follow. Harbor the sublime though that more than two thousand years ago, Euclid, Archimedes, Pythagoria, first wrestled with, and solved these geometric riddles.

At midweek convocation period, again and again I recall the reading by our principal Chester T. Lane, to the whole student body seated before him in the tiny Central High Auditorium, the part of scriptures contained in the Third Chapter of Proverbs:

> "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction; For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth; Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and that getteth understanding; For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold; She is more precious than rubies; and all the

things thou can'st desire are not to be compared to her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is everyone that retaineth her."

The aforegoing passage must have been his favorite Biblical quotation; To Me He was a Great Teacher.

NOW, I know too, that not Ten in One-hundred of those who may have sat at the "Feet of The Buddha," will agree with me; In fact many would violently disagree! !

Mine was the Class of 1907
However that may be, I'm for this fitting memorial to Chester T. Lane.

Yours very truly,

/s/ A. K. Hofer